



Jonathan Wilkinson

NORTH VANCOUVER'S MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT

May 17, 2019

A Sustainable Future for Salmon

In a recent mailer sent to North Vancouverites, I shared a story about the “Salmonids in the Classroom” program at Cleveland Elementary. In March, I was at Cleveland to talk to Grade 2 and 7 students about the salmon fry they were so proudly raising. Then, on April 26th, I joined these students to release their fry into Mackay Creek.

“Salmonids in the Classroom” is a program that has been around for years. This season, there are 40 in-class incubators in 23 elementary and 6 secondary schools in the North Vancouver School District. It is an important educational tool for bringing youth closer to how ecosystems work, and the challenges that many ecosystems are facing in an era of climate change and unprecedented declines in biodiversity.

Fraser Chinook Salmon At Risk

In BC, it is clear that salmon represent more than just food. Salmon are linked to cultural identity, they are fundamental to Indigenous communities, and are a significant indicator of environmental health.

Many BC salmon populations, particularly Fraser Chinook, have experienced declines in recent years. Twelve of the Fraser’s thirteen Chinook salmon populations have been identified by scientists as being at significant risk. British Columbians are rightly concerned about the state of wild salmon stocks. I very much share that concern.

To address these declines, there are several areas in which we must act:

- 1) Habitat protection – Our federal government is bringing in a new Fisheries Act to restore protections for fish habitat that were eliminated by the Harper government;
- 2) Habitat restoration - I recently announced the \$142M Salmon Restoration Fund to enable salmon habitat restoration projects in communities across the province. This represents an *historic* investment on the part of the federal and BC governments;
- 3) Improved stock assessment – DFO recently committed an additional \$107M to improve fish stock assessments, which will contribute to a better-managed fishery;
- 4) Predator concerns – In partnership with UBC, we are convening a

symposium this fall to bring forward relevant science regarding the potential impacts of seals and sea lions.

Fisheries Management

Beyond the initiatives outlined above, thoughtful fisheries management is also a vital component of *any* comprehensive approach.

Habitat restoration is clearly critical for longer term stock rebuilding efforts, but such efforts take time. In the shorter term, we simply *must* ensure that a sufficient number of Fraser Chinook are getting to their spawning grounds.

That is why, some weeks ago, I announced fisheries measures crafted to protect these endangered stocks. These measures provide for a catch and release recreational fishery until the Fraser River stocks have left relevant areas. Similar restrictions will be in place for First Nations food and ceremonial fisheries, and for relevant commercial fisheries.

Difficult Decisions

These fisheries decisions were difficult and were taken only after extensive consultations and a thorough review of scientific evidence. The restrictions were mindful of what we had heard from fisheries stakeholders. These measures were, however, underpinned by what the scientific evidence told us is required.

Personally, I believe very strongly that policy decisions on issues like this should be informed by science. Such decisions should simply not be based solely on political considerations.

While I very much sympathize with concerns that have been vocally expressed by recreational harvesters, I would not be doing the job that Canadians expect of their Minister of Fisheries, and that North Vancouverites expect of their MP, if I were to knowingly allow Fraser Chinook to be put on a path to extinction.

Moving forward, much needs to be done to manage Fraser Chinook in a way that conserves and rebuilds populations. This will be a challenge and I acknowledge there will be controversy. But it is a path we must follow if we are to ensure sustainability for the future. This is very much the future I was considering while standing with the Cleveland Elementary students and parents releasing 196 salmon fry into Mackay Creek.

CONTACT INFO:

CONSTITUENCY OFFICE: 102 West 3rd Street, North Vancouver
EMAIL: Jonathan.Wilkinson@parl.gc.ca | TEL: 604-775-6333